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ABSTRACT

This project focused on the use of creative dramatics as a teaching tool in core academic subject classrooms. Research has shown that student-centered instructional activities, such as the use of creative dramatics, allow students to construct knowledge and make meaningful the new concepts being learned. This case study describes the classroom experiences of a sixth-grade math and remedial reading teacher and a sixth-grade language arts and social studies teacher who use creative dramatics as a teaching tool. As a result of using creative dramatics in teaching subjects such as language arts and social studies, both teachers have witnessed gains in the cognitive and social development of their students. (Contains 13 references.) (RS)

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ED 461 127

Creative Dramatics as an Effective Teaching Strategy

University of Virginia
Master's Thesis Project

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Abstract

The focus of this project was on the use of creative dramatics as a teaching tool in core academic subject classrooms. Research has shown that student-centered instructional activities, such as the use of creative dramatics, allow students to construct knowledge and make meaningful the new concepts being learned. This project describes the classroom experiences of two teachers who use creative dramatics as a teaching tool. As a result of using creative dramatics in teaching subjects such as language arts and social studies, both teachers have witnessed gains in the cognitive and social development of their students.

Creative Dramatics as an Effective Teaching Strategy

Numerous research findings and countless observations have been made which suggest that students frequently are not actively engaged in their learning. All too often, one can look into any classroom and see that there are students seated in their desks arranged in rows, twiddling their thumbs or passing notes, while the teacher is at the front of the class lecturing for extended periods of time. As research has shown, (Resnick and Klopfer, 1989) learners actively construct links between information that they already know and new information they are trying to learn. Non-engaging teaching strategies do not readily provide an avenue for learners to be active. Consequently, students and teachers suffer in a classroom environment that is void of excitement, activity, discourse, and learning. As a result of such learning environments, we deal with student failure to pass from one grade level to the next, high drop out rates, and overall poor achievement.

There is also an increasing need for teachers to use different strategies because the learners of today are more diverse culturally, economically, as well as academically (Villegas, 1991). In addition, because of the wealth of entertaining stimuli that exists outside the classroom, it has become increasingly difficult for educators to maintain students' interest in subject matter. Children have grown up with television, movies, and more recently video games, that compete with a teacher's ability to capture their interest. However, it is not hopeless. Certain teaching practices have been shown to captivate, motivate, and engage students in learning.

The teaching practices that have been successful at engaging students in learning, more often tend to be student-centered rather than teacher-directed. Cooperative-learning, discussion, dialogues, hands-on activities, and the use of dramatic arts in the classroom are a few examples of such non-directive teaching strategies. The previously mentioned practices are all grounded in the research-based foundation of the Cognitive Learning Theory.

Cognitive Learning Theory essentially states that learners actively construct knowledge and are not passive recipients of information. In order for learning to be meaningful, connections are made between information that learners already know and new information that they are trying to learn. Students are aided in making these connections by a teacher who is also active in the learning process. The teacher facilitates learning by creating a stimulating learning environment for students, asking the students questions that require them to think critically, and allowing students to investigate, explore, and question the concepts they are trying to learn. The use of student-centered instructional methods allow students to construct knowledge and make meaningful the new concepts being learned. While a variety of instructional practices have been shown to engage students in learning, the remainder of this paper will focus on one such strategy: the use of dramatic arts.

Literature Review

Dramatic arts as defined by Gretta Berghammer is "a process of social, intellectual and creative exploration. It develops from the human need to communicate and is one of many processes by which humans learn about themselves

and their world. Through the language of drama, individuals interact with each other, sharing thoughts, feelings, and experiences" (1995, p.1). The definition of creative dramatics that has been accepted by The Children's Theatre Association of America is "creative drama is an improvisational, non-exhibition, process centered form of drama in which the participants are guided by a leader to imagine, enact, and reflect upon human experiences" (Davis and Behm, 1978 p. 10). Proponents of the use of creative dramatics in the classroom argue that when participants, or learners, are guided by a leader, or teacher, on this journey of the human experience, the learners begin to construct meaningful knowledge for themselves.

> Drama is a way of knowing, a way of collecting primary and secondary evidence which contributes to individual knowledge. Knowledge, therefore, is the result of the choices of evidence each individual makes, a continuing, dynamic process. By improvising drama, students acquire primary knowledge. (Kase-Polisini, 1985 p.xv)

It is my opinion that a teacher's job is to facilitate learners' acquisition of knowledge by providing lessons and experiences in which learners can make those important links between past knowledge and new information. Creative dramatics is a tool that can be used to facilitate the construction of knowledge in most subjects, especially the humanities. Role-play, discovery games, puppet theatre, miming, etc., are options that are provided to the teacher that can help students relate to historical, literary and scientific information being taught.

The use of creative dramatics is not limited to those subjects of the academic arena. Creative dramatics also fosters social growth which is another important component to healthy human development. "When children are engaged in pretend play they are likely to be more cooperative, more communicative, and are willing to accept reinforcement from their peers" (Charlesworth and Hartup, 1967 p.993). Social growth is not only facilitated by the peer interaction a student has when working cooperatively during a dramatic activity, but can also be encouraged when a teacher uses creative dramatics to explore various social issues that students might not experience first hand but have read about or heard about outside of the classroom.

Why Creative Dramatics?: Cognitive Development

J.P. Guilford is one of the most prominent theorists in the field of cognition and an expert in the role that creativity plays in cognitive development. His three dimensional model of the Structure of Intellect isolates "Divergent Production" abilities as those most important for creative thinking. Divergent production refers to one's ability to produce a variety of responses to any given stimulus. "In order to be able to produce divergent responses, the individual must possess fluency and flexibility of thought so that elaboration can occur" (Bailey, 1987 p 13). In his paper, Bailey also proposes that some of the implications this theory has on education are as follows:

> ...enough variety in instructional approaches should provide opportunities for such [creative personality] characteristics to blossom. Creativity in the cognitive domain need to be fostered, both, via curriculum content and

> instructional strategies... Awareness of developmental stages in creative growth should guide both content of instruction and teacher expectations. (Bailey, 1987 p.14)

Studies have also shown that creative thinking spans over an entire lifetime. Earlier research focused on the measurable creative products of famous individuals such as Charles Darwin, Wolfgang Mozart, and Mahatma Ghandi. These studies concluded that "creative production peaks around the age of 30 and then invariably declines" (Bailey, 1987 p.14). However, there have been newer studies done that focus on the development of creativity. These studies focus on the process of creative behavior rather than on the final product. Taylor (1959) developed a model of creative development that progresses over five stages. "These stages, then, point to qualitatively different stages of creativity with differing goals and typical activities"(Bailey, 1987 p.14). Taylor's Stage Model of Creativity divides the stages of creativity over an individual's entire life span.

The first stage of Taylor's model, Expressive Spontaneity, takes place from birth until about the age of six. During this stage learners engage in spontaneous art, dance, expressive games, and impromptu language. The second stage, Technical Proficiency, takes place between the ages of seven and 12. During this time the learner is interested in refinement. They produce detailed drawings, they replicate intricate movements, and they develop various skills. Inventive Ingenuity, Taylor's third stage, takes place from the age of 13 to the mid-twenties. During this time a learner's isolated skills are combined creatively, and various areas of interest are

associated inventively. The fourth stage, Innovative Flexibility, occurs between the late twenties and the late thirties. The learners basic ideas are modified creatively for one's own purpose during this stage. His model contradicts earlier studies which indicate that creative development declines after the age of 30. Taylor's fifth stage, Emergentive Originality, takes place around the age of 40 and beyond and signifies that if learners receive the proper stimulation in the earlier stages of cognitive and creative development, they go on to "synthesize all of previously acquired skills and insights to create new and original breakthroughs" (Baldwin, Colangelo, and Dettmann, 1984 p.9).

Gestalt psychology is also a school of psychology from which basic theories of cognition have risen. Gestalt psychologists such as Max Wertheimer and his associates, grounded most of their research in the role that perception has on cognition. "[They] were interested in the fact that perception tends to be organized into meaningful patterns that include relationships between elements in addition to the elements themselves" (Good and Brophy, 1990, p. 188). The basic idea behind gestalt theories is based on two factors; gestalt and insight.

> Gestalt is a term that means configuration or pattern.
>
> A gestalt is an integrated whole that has identity and meaning in its own right, not merely as the sum of it's parts. Individual parts can be defined as elements, but they are resulted in Gestalten, or configurational patterns, to form larger parts and ultimately the whole. (Good and Brophy, 1990 p. 188)

Although Gestalt psychologists used and developed visual illusions to gather a large part of their research, gestalt theories are not limited to visual perception. "Gestalt integrates visual components, movement, sound, as well as units of thought" (Bailey, 1987). So the Gestalt psychologists are also interested in how the artist perceives and applies color, how the dancer perceives and performs the dance step, as well as how the learner perceives and constructs knowledge from various facts. Gestaltists also agree that in order for genuine learning to occur learners also have to have a genuine understanding or insight of the problem they are trying to solve.

"Insight involves an understanding of the inherent structure of the problem situation and results in the finding of a solution of the problem" (Bailey, 1987). In other words, a learner cannot follow a given formula to solve problems if meaningful learning is to occur. It is when a learner gains insight to a proposed problem-- constructing meaning by linking previous knowledge with new information-- that educators begin to see "the light bulb go on" in a student's mind. This type of learning is so meaningful that students retain this knowledge far longer than that acquired through traditional methods of instruction, including rote memorization. Michael Wertheimer formulated some implications that classical gestalt theory has for education that are summarized by Bailey as follows:

> Learning depends on perception. Since learning is the process of discovery of the environment, how we perceive what is crucial about a particular situation is of prime importance. Learning involves reorganization. Since learners are not generally able to instantly and correctly understand every situation, a need

> for a conceptual reorganization of most problem situations exists. Instruction has to aid this reorganization by aiding the student in recognizing the structure and essential components of a problem. Learning is about what leads to what. Since much of learning is concerned with consequences, instruction should be aimed at having the student discover the laws of cause and effect in the 'real world'. (Bailey, 1987 pp.41-42)

As has been discussed, creative learning in the cognitive domain, is very important in the development of any learner. The use of creative dramatics in the classroom creates the conditions necessary for learning to occur on all of the levels stated above. The ages during which a child attends school are the most formative years as far as creative and cognitive development is concerned. Creative dramatics allows learners to synthesize all of the bits and pieces of information that they acquire throughout a unit into meaningful information for themselves (McCaslin, 1996).

Why Creative Dramatics?: Social Development

Erik Erikson developed his psychosocial theory of life-stages around healthy personality development. His theory, The Eight Stages of Man, is largely based on how one is affected by social influence. "Erikson's theory centers around the acquisition of identity which is seen as the self in relationship to one's society. He sees this identity as being redefined in each stage -with each successive stage being influenced by earlier stages" (Bailey, 1987 p 3).

Three of Erikson's stages occur during the years while one is attending school. The relationships one acquires and activities that are done in those years at school can result in a positive self image.

> ...as children begin school they are starting to enter the 'industrious age' meaning that they come with a desire to explore the larger world of knowledge at work. If the child is supplied with many opportunities to exercise this urge to do and learn, the sense of industry, a feeling of mastery and competence, which is gained in that period will result in a healthy self image. This positive self concept will help to reduce the stress of the subsequent stage of 'identity crisis', a term Erikson coined to describe the period of adolescent struggle with the question of 'Who Am I?'. (Bailey, 1987 p.4)

Creative dramatics provides the way for children to exercise the urge to do and to learn. Freud viewed creative play as the projection of wishes and the reenactment of conflicts in order to master them. Erikson concurred with his theory arguing that by externalizing problems and pressures a player is able to control them. Thus, an unpleasant experience can be resolved and put to rest (McCaslin, 1996, 45).

Lawrence Kohlberg is another theorist in the area of social and emotional development, but his focus is on the issue of moral development. "Kohlberg defined moral reasoning in terms of judgment about justice, viewing the child as a philosopher in the process of constructing meaning around universal questions and fairness" (Bailey, 1987 p. 6). Kohlberg's theory progresses over six universal stages

of moral development. These stages are considered universal because they do not focus on specific values, which can differ according to one's culture. Rather, Kohlberg focuses on the underlying modes of reasoning to determine his stages (Bailey, 1987).

In order to graduate from one of Kohlberg's stages to another, the learners sense of right and wrong needs to be challenged through various interactions.

> These interactions are what provokes the child to develop more comprehensive positions on questions of moral reasoning. Although these interactions may arise spontaneously, some research has shown that moral development can be advanced if the school provides opportunities for thinking about and for discussing moral issues. (Bailey, 1987 p 6)

Through the use of creative dramatics a teacher can provide a learner with the opportunity to think about, discuss, as well as engage in a fictional activity that might challenge their moral reasoning in a controlled environment. Through activities such as these a learner can seriously question how they would handle themselves in certain situations without actually being in danger of compromising their morals.

Creative Dramatics: Definition and Perspectives

Birth was given to the concept of "creative dramatics" in the 1930's by a teacher named Winifred Ward. Winifred Ward began to experiment in her classroom with dramatic activities that took what was known as drama beyond the memorized play script and into the classroom learning activities. Her work is the beginning of what is now known as creative dramatics or creative drama.

In Creative Dramatics by Winifred Ward an outline is provided of the successful exercises which she had developed and implemented in the classroom as well as, a systematic approach to using creative dramatics in the classroom. The basic principles of Ward's approach are as follows:

> The major goals are the individual and social development of the participants... the five major objectives and categories of activities are movement/pantomime, sensitivity, characterization, dialogue, and story drama... the activities move from simple to more complex skill acquisition... characterization is the main key to drama's value for children... literature is the main stimulus for drama... the acting out of stories is the culmination of dramatic learning... performance is a vital aspect of the approach... the leader is a guide. (Rosenberg, 1987 p.29)

Brian Way is another theorist in the field of creative dramatics. He began his career as an actor, and then went on to become a director and a playwright. Throughout his studies, he began to see the connection between various dramatic techniques and children's play. From his past experiences and observations, he developed a theory which provided the basis for his book Development Through Drama written in 1967. This book was considered very insightful and was used to teach educational drama in many universities throughout Europe and the United States.

The basic premise behind his theory is that "dramatic learning occurs in seven areas: concentration, the senses, imagination, physical self, speech, emotion, and

intellect" (Rosenberg, 1987 p.31). Way believes that a final "polished" production is not what is important. Rather, the dramatic process as well as the reflection of one's process are the most meaningful to a student using creative dramatics. The principles that provide the structure of Way's approach are as follows:

> Major goal is the development of the human being... the structure is the circle model of human development, from self discovery to interaction of self with environment... activities stress drama process, not theatre product... the environment is noncompetitive, it has an atmosphere of trust and cooperation... there is simultaneous individual and pair work, with few performances and little leader evaluation... leader is also learner... life events are the stimuli for drama... five minute segments of drama performed consistently are preferable to longer chunks of drama performed on an irregular basis. (Rosenberg 1987, p.33)

Another dynamic person in the field of educational drama is Dorothy Heathcote. Heathcote was the subject of a book titled Dorothy Heathcote: Drama as a Learning Medium written by Betty Jane Wagner in 1976. Wagner served as an unbiased observer who recorded the activities and theories Dorothy Heathcote practiced.

Most of Heathcote's theories were developed throughout her experiences as a teacher in England. Her approach "...utilizes philosophies and theories from sociology, anthropology, and religion as a way to help participants view the human condition" (Rosenberg, 1987 p. 35). The principles behind Dorothy Heathcote's

theory are: "Drama itself is learning; and the leader is the essential catalyst of the drama" (Rosenberg, 1987 p. 36). Heathcote also believes that dramatic improvisation is one of the best tools one can use to achieve the goal of understanding the human condition. A basic sketch of her approach is as follows:

> To provide the focus for reflecting on and analyzing life's experiences and also the place to test them in action... the leader is a participant in and has great responsibility for the drama... leader-in-training must master a variety of specific techniques... the material for drama focuses on the human condition... the style of the approach is flamboyant, possibly because it mirrors the personal teaching style of Dorothy Heathcote herself... drama is valued for its own cognitive and affective components... appropriately chosen and structured activities achieve almost immediate results. (Rosenberg, 1987 p.38)

Viola Spolin is another educator and theorist who believes in the use of creative dramatics in the classroom. Unlike the theories and approaches that have already been discussed, Spolin's approach is centered around theatre games. In 1963, she wrote Improvisation for the Theatre. She later developed the Theatre Game File which resembled a recipe file of theatre games classified by age and theme. Viola Spolin's interest in theatre goes back to her memory of playing childhood games such as charades and dress-up. Spolin experimented with theatrical games when she directed improvisational theatre troupes in the 1930's. Out of this excursion as well as many others as a director, Spolin refined her approach. To ensure that her actors

maintained the feeling of playing a game, she began to call them 'players' instead of actors.

> The Spolin approach is based on the assumption that players will make educational, psychological, and social gains as they participate in theatre games. The major premise is that dramatic learning can happen only when the individual drops the self conscious inhibitions and spontaneously reacts to the here-and-now situation. (Rosenberg, 1987 p. 40)

By participating in these theatre games, one is able to drop their inhibitions and open themselves up to receive knowledge as they are forced to confront themselves, others, and their environment.

Geraldine Siks offers yet another approach to using creative dramatics with young people. Ever since her book Creative Drama: An Art for Children was published in 1958, Siks has been a well known figure in the field of creative drama. Research has been the basis for Siks' approach. With the help of a colleague, Geraldine Siks developed the child drama program at the University of Washington at Seattle. The research gained through this experience, as well as that gained while working on the research task force of the Central Atlantic Regional Laboratory, provided her with material in which to ground her theories.

Siks defines drama as "a multifaceted subject that is both an art form firmly rooted in theatre and a language art basic to education" (Rosenberg, 1987 p 44). Recognizing the power of drama in the arts as well as the language arts, Siks believed that drama deserved a place in the educational curriculum. Much of drama exists in

the written as well as the spoken word. In order for one to fully appreciate theatre they must be able to interpret a written play. Once a learner or player can interpret a play and convey the playwright's messages through their speech and actions they can get to the heart of theatre. Being able to interpret the written word is also at the heart of the language arts curriculum.

The three basic components to Siks' theory are; drama as an art, drama as a language art, and the Process-Concept approach. Both drama as an art and drama as a language art are concepts that have been accepted by many over the past centuries. The most original component of Geraldine Siks' theory is that of the Process-Concept Approach.

Siks offers the process-concept approach as a way to present drama in a way that makes it basic to education. As students go through the process of interpreting or writing a play they are also learning the dramatic concepts behind that play. "She believes that leaders and participants must understand the nature of drama, so that both become conscious of the learning experience. The process-concept theory helps leaders to understand that participants are involved in the process of doing drama while they explore drama concepts" (Rosenberg, 1987 pp. 45 and 46).

Winifred Ward, Brian Way, Dorothy Heathcote, Viola Spolin, and Geraldine Siks are not alone in their recognition of creative dramatics as a powerful educational tool. Many other theorists would concur with their reasoning and approaches to using drama in the classroom. Children have been learning from each other through the

power of play for a long time. It is only logical that teachers harness this power to teach those objectives outlined in the curriculum as well.

> Play is an important aspect of the learning process. A child enjoys play and takes it seriously, a process through which learning takes place. Perhaps it is the word serious that gives us trouble. Although play is serious to children, they know they are playing and enjoy it; therein lies their freedom. (McCaslin, 1996 p. 45)

Drama is perceived by most children as play. Consequently, as they are involved in dramatic arts to learn content, they are engaged and enjoying their learning.

Methods

To develop my case study, I used a method called purposeful sampling (Patton, 1990). Patton describes purposeful sampling as "information-rich cases for study in depth" (Patton, 1990, p. 169). "Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of research, thus the terms purposeful sampling" (Patton, 1990, p.169). There are a number of ways in which a researcher can choose his/her purposeful sample. For my purposes I used two: one based on convenience and the other based on criterion.

Two teachers, described later in more detail, participated in my study. Both subjects provided rich sources of information for my study on the use of creative dramatics in the classroom. In choosing the subjects, convenience sampling was used in light of time constraints as well as subject availability. Both subjects also met the basic criterion I established. The two subjects studied are experienced teachers, they

are reflective about the approaches they use to teach subject matter, they have taught classes in either social studies, language arts, math, or science, and they frequently implement creative dramatics in their classrooms. The two participants in this study proved to be rich sources of information.

...

1. Chris- A male teacher in his thirties has been teaching for at least 12 years. During this 1996-1997 academic year he is teaching 6th grade math and remedial reading at the middle school level. He has an acting background and believes in using creative dramatics with his class.

2. Janet- A female teacher in her twenties completed her student teaching during the 1996-1997 academic year. She will be graduating and receiving her Master of Teaching in Elementary Education and her Bachelor's degree in drama in August of 1997. Janet student taught in a sixth grade language arts and social studies classroom, as well as a self-contained third grade classroom. She has a dramatic background and strongly believes in the use of creative dramatics in her classroom.

A Conversation with Chris and Janet about the Use of Creative Dramatics in the Classroom

Question 1: What subjects and skills do you believe can be taught using dramatic arts?

Chris: Most of the dramatic things that I have done have come through reading and language arts. Literature is such a natural bridge.

Janet: The dramatic arts also incorporate a lot of skills that should be mastered by a student before they graduate. Skills such as public speaking, working cooperatively in

groups, researching and appreciating literature. Naturally, language arts lends itself; but I also feel that dramatics can be used in history, science, and possibly even math.

Question 2: What dramatic activities have you done while teaching these subjects?

Chris: The first play I did with some sixth grade kids was when we were doing mysteries so, I found a play that went with that unit. I have done puppet theatre with kids. That came out of a writing class where we were studying different formats in writing. We were reading plays and we were talking about that kind of format so the puppet theatre was a culminating activity. The students had to write their own scripts using the different formats we were studying and make puppets, and we built the puppet stage and so forth.

Janet: Well, I recently did something I called and Archaeological Discoveries Forum with my sixth graders. The forum was designed in order for them to share the mummy projects I had assigned earlier in the year with them. Also, in order to introduce this new historical figure into our Egyptian civilization unit and also to add a little more cultural perspective to our unit I decided to come to class dressed as the queen Nefertiti. I also accepted the challenge of teaching twenty-five third graders as much as I could about Egypt in 35 minutes. In order to do this, I solicited help from a colleague to perform a skit set in an ancient Egyptian pyramid. I also made magazines complete with pictures of the Great Pyramids in Giza, treasure found in King Tutankhamen's tomb, mummification tools, and activities based on Egyptian numbers, hieroglyphics, etc., to help with this task.

Question 3: Describe the racial and academic diversity of the students in your classes.

Chris: ...my first teaching job I taught at a rural, economically disadvantaged elementary school. We did a lot of dramatic things with those kids because we wanted to expose them to things that they had never seen and probably would never see it was also a good way to get them involved in their education. I've always worked in schools that were disadvantaged. The kids were what we now call at-risk and dramatic arts is especially effective with at risk kids because it excites them toward learning; and when they are excited about learning, they want to come to school. I had a class of multi-categorical handicapped kids about eight or nine years ago. We did a fairy tale, The Three Little Pigs, and it was great because these kids were able to do things that many thought they could not do. I could definitely see a change in their attitude from day to day.

Janet: The middle school I taught in would be considered a rural school. The students came from varied socio-economic backgrounds, but I would say that seventy-five percent of my students were lower to middle class and about twenty-five percent of my students were middle to upper-middle class. I had eight students with learning disabilities, and about four of those students also had behavior problems. The elementary school where I taught at was considered an inner-city school. A lot of the kids in the school population were on free and reduced lunch. I would say that out of the twenty students I had in that third grade classroom about fourteen were African-American and out of those approximately five were ADD or ADHD.

Question 4: Did your students vary in their learning styles and abilities?

Chris: I had a class of multi-categorical handicapped kids. Two or three of them had cerebral palsy. Three or four of them were emotionally disturbed and one student was a pre-verbal Downs Syndrome child. There were lots of things they couldn't do but we managed it. I had one student who today would definitely be classified ADD or ADHD or something. He couldn't learn anything in class. He had all the symptoms of kids we know with learning disabilities today. This kid had no self esteem. He had come from a tough background at home and having the lead in a play gave him an opportunity to just get up front of his classmates and shine. Right now I have the at-risk reading group. I've got kids reading on a first and second grade reading level and some on a third/fourth grade level. This is a diverse group. I think that the reason dramatic arts has been able to affect all of my kids is because it requires the use of many skills such as, listening skills, kinesthetic skills, visual skills and performing skills. Everyone's learning style can be accommodated using the dramatic arts, therefore the kids are not only engaged in learning but also are not continually struggling to learn.

Janet: I had a few students with ADHD who would have their bad days and would not want to cooperate at all with my lessons. It was a rare occurrence that they would sit still and pay attention while I gave a lecture. I guess you could consider me dressing up like Nefertiti and talking to the kids like that, a lecture, but I did not have one behavior problem out of my students the entire time. I had one little boy who was very shy about getting in front of the class to act so I asked him to be the stage

manager. He really took charge of his job and maintaining control of his classmates... his classmates listened to him and respected him. He really came out of his shell.

Question 5: How do your colleagues react to your use of creative dramatics?

Chris: They are very supportive. They realize that it is not an easy thing to do because many of them have done it or attempted to implement in the past. They support it by being flexible with schedule changes. They support it by giving me suggestions or coming up with set and costume materials; Or even by putting in a little labor of their own. They support it by having their students attend a performance as well as providing some feedback. Um, those are some biggies there. You don't interact with all teachers at all schools and everybody has got different personalities, but you work with people close enough to know how much can I ask of this person. Diplomacy is a wonderful thing. Everybody has got there limits, because they got things they have to do too, but it is amazing how much people will help you.

Janet: Well, the support has been great. Or at least no one has discouraged me. The principals have seen the things that I have done and told me what a great job I am doing. The cooperating teachers have been great, and encouraging. Sometimes they are surprised at how well the students learn the information afterwards and want to get some helpful hints about how to do a lesson using some creative dramatics. At the middle school, all of the teachers let their students come to see my students' play. They pat me on the back all of the time. So anyway, everyone has been very supportive.

Question 6: What difficulties have you faced while using creative dramatics in the classroom?

Chris: Well depending on your school and the area you live in it may be hard to find supplies such as; lighting equipment and materials to build scenery if you are doing a big show and you are in a school that does not have such amenities. Producing a play and rehearsals can be very time consuming especially if you are not organized. Sometimes rehearsal can be maddening. The kids are at a stage in the sixth grade where they want to socialize and such, sometimes you have to get at them in so that they will cooperate with me and stay on task.

Janet: There are not very many difficulties that I have faced. One may perceive all of the time I put into a project a difficulty, but I guess that depends on the project and the teacher. Many of teachers put a lot of time into their lessons which do not involve creative dramatics. Great lessons have a lot invested in them, including preparation time.

Question 7: Do you have any helpful hints for teachers who might want to try to use creative dramatics in their classrooms?

Chris: I know from experience, first you've got to have the will and the desire. You have to believe that this is important; That this is something we ought to do. That's first, and go through with it. But I think anybody who wants to do a good job, I think anybody who's a smart enough teacher to know that this is important, will certainly seek out some advice or seek out somebody who's had some experience. I mean nobody's going to want to do this cold-- nobody with any common sense. But just

because you are not trained, and haven't done performances, shouldn't inhibit you from trying new things.

Janet: I have seen teachers use different techniques that could be considered dramatic activities in their rooms and they probably did not even know it. Most teachers use simulations of some sort, or something. I don't think that you need formal training. As far a staging a play, some experience would be helpful, but that experience could come from being in a school play when you were a child. You could also find a book at the library that could help you form a checklist of things that you need to do in order to get a play off the ground. I would suggest that you not bite off more than you can chew at first. Start simple but definitely use it, try to observe how your students think and what they enjoy doing and build from that. You could even get ideas from the students by asking them what would they like to do and try to make it happen. Give them a lot of responsibility for the activities you choose, they will take it more seriously and will be more proud of it when it is over, and you will not have to run around like a chicken with your head cut off trying to do everything. I am sure that people could also get some ideas and pointers from newsgroup or a book or something.

A Case Study of the Use of Dramatic Arts in the Classroom

Janet can be considered a creative individual, as is reflected by her fifteen year of study in music and more recently her studies in drama. She, like all adults, has experienced "playing" in her childhood, and the recognition she received in high school theatre productions prompted her to take the study of theatre more seriously.

When asked about how she became inspired to use creative dramatics as a teaching tool in the classroom, she began to reflect on her education and how much confidence she had gained because of her creative talents. She spoke about the different types of learners and where she felt she fit.

> There are four categories, I can't think of them all right now, but they generally say that some people excel creatively, some academically and some kinesthetically. I have always been one of the 'creative' people and I strongly believe that had I not been given the proper vehicle to excel creatively I would not have been as successful as I have been academically. I would not have had the confidence. Confidence is something not a lot of children have, and that might be what made the difference between me and some of my classmates who had not established themselves academically and did not have the opportunity to excel creatively, for whatever reasons.

Janet's own educational experiences seem like they should have been enough to encourage her to use these techniques in the classroom, but it was not until she heard of an experienced gifted-education teacher talk about using creative dramatics as an instructional tool that she thought this was a viable technique.

> But the kicker happened at a seminar that took place during my teaching associateship. An experienced gifted-education teacher talked about going into classes, at the classroom teacher's request, dressed as a character in order to help the teacher introduce a unit. For example, she would dress as Mrs. Frizzle and become Mrs. Frizzle in order to talk about the water cycle to a bunch of

> third graders. I remember thinking what a great idea that was. Not only have the students been captivated, but a teacher can dress up and act in the classroom too. That was right up my alley!

Janet's decisions about using creative dramatics in the classroom are not based on her desire to act, but rather stem from a desire to captivate and engage her students in learning and more importantly to foster retention of the learned information. Throughout the interview, Janet made comments that revealed her passion about creative dramatics and the benefits of using this technique.

> I think that it is a fun, engaging, in-depth, creative, way to get students to learn information. I think that using dramatic arts is a nice way to tie all of the different concepts a student has learned in a unit together. Think about relating to children on their level and making learning meaningful to them. When I implemented creative dramatics during my student teaching the responses I got from the students and the looks on their faces made all of the work I did very worth it. I did not lose them one time during any of the activities using dramatic arts nor did I have any behavior problems! I love to make those connections for my students, I like to give them something that they can relate to, not just abstract ideas floating all over the place.

Janet's comments reflect that she believes that using creative dramatics will engage students in what they are learning. She also believes that using creative dramatics is an effective way of helping students make links between the concepts she is trying to teach and the information they already know.

While teaching a unit on Egypt, Janet dressed and played the role of Nefertiti. She developed the activity in order to "introduce this new historical figure into our Egypt unit and also to add a little more cultural perspective to the unit." In order to achieve these goals as well as the goals of engaging the students and helping them make links with previously learned content on Egypt, Janet came to class dressed as the Egyptian queen, Nefertiti. She chose this method of teaching the information because she felt that it was an effective way to teach a lot of information in a short period of time. She also felt that speaking to them in first person and in costume, was a more tangible and powerful way to teach the information when compared with traditional techniques.

> I decided that a more effective and interesting way to have them understand how and why these things could have been used was to say that I, as Nefertiti, put on my make up using these tools, then show them a picture of actual artifacts found by archaeologists in one of the books I checked out from the library. Then they could then look up at me and see the make up around my eyes. The Xeroxed pictures of ancient Egyptian pyramids, actual Egyptian toys children played with, models of what archaeologists believe ancient Egyptian homes looked like, statues and hieroglyphs of Nefertiti, Akhenaten, and their family, etc., became personal photographs family albums.

Janet prepared quite extensively for this activity. So much so, that when asked whether or not she felt she learned and retained any information about Nefertiti she replied, "Let me tell you that I could probably write my own book on Nefertiti! When

I realized how powerful a learning strategy researching and playing a historical character was, I decided that my future students will also research and take on the identifies of historical figures."

In order to accurately portray Nefertiti, Janet had to go in-depth into Nefertiti's history and the culture in which she lived.

> I prepared quite extensively for my role of Nefertiti. I used a lot of the information that I had already shared with the students, but I had to go beyond that in order to really prepare for my character. I had to figure out exactly what clothes Nefertiti wore as the queen in the 18th dynasty, and why the culture dictated that these clothes be worn, how did the women of the time do their hair, and why did they do their hair this way, etc. While doing the research I also found out that some archaeologists suspect that Nefertiti was not always rich, that she was the daughter of a peasant. This gave me the opportunity to introduce the lifestyle of the common people of that time into the mix. I found out what the commoners of the time wore, ate, drank, and why they did these things. How did the environment contribute to their choices? How many children did Nefertiti have? What kinds of toys did the children of the time play with? What did Nefertiti's and Akhenaten's, and others' houses look like? I also had to find out who Akhenaten was. What were his policies as a Pharaoh in Egypt? As Nefertiti's spouse, what were their contributions as a ruling couple?, How did the people feel about them? Why did Akhenaten make Nefertiti change her name? Why did Akhenaten change

> the name of the capital of Egypt? etc. I wanted and needed to know all of this information so that I would not break character. I tried to anticipate every question the students would ask by asking myself 'if Nefertiti came over for coffee what would I want to know about her and her lifestyle?' More questions kept surfacing because the more information I found out the more I wanted to know about the new information. It was a continuous circle of discovery.

After learning all of this information Janet was able to assume the character of Nefertiti. The day before Janet role-played Nefertiti, the students were told by Mrs. Westbank, Janet's clinical instructor, that a special guest would be coming to class the next day to tell them more about Egypt. On the day that Nefertiti came to class, Janet pretended to leave the class at Mrs. Westbank's request in order to make copies of a test. During that time Janet got into her costume and make up, and went to a nearby teacher's classroom to ask her to announce the arrival of their anticipated guest. After she was announced, Janet walked into the classroom in the character of Nefertiti. She admits that there were some initial snickers and that there were two boys who did not initially fully cooperate, but after the first five minutes, everyone was listening and asking thoughtful questions. Questions included, 'Nefertiti, if you and your husband did so many good things then why did everyone destroy monuments they made for you? Why did Egyptian women of that time wear so much make up?' The students also got into a debate about why and how Akhenaten could make Nefertiti change her

name and a debate over why girls were not allowed to go to school but boys were allowed to go to school.

The "Conversation with Nefertiti" went on for about an hour. Before ending, Janet, as Nefertiti, announced that she would have to return to Egypt and was sorry to have to leave so abruptly. The children were disappointed to see her go and asked her to stop in again sometime. Janet, out of costume, returned to an excited class with an arm full of papers that she ran off for Mrs. Westbank. The students told her what an exciting visitor she had missed.

> I came into the classroom with my papers and Mrs. Westbank was up in front of the class reviewing all of the things Nefertiti had talked to them about. They looked over at me, some of them were giggling, and Mrs. Westbank asked me what took me so long. I told her that there was a problem with the copying machine. She said 'Oh, no that's too bad. You missed a very interesting guest, right class?' All of them shouted 'Yes you did! Where were you?', etc. I acted really sorry to miss the guest and I asked them to tell me who came to visit and what this visitor had to say. This discussion went on for longer than I anticipated and it cut into the students' recess time. I told them that we could stop talking about it but the majority of them did not want to stop. We lined up and went outside and those students who wanted to continue talking sat with me in a circle outside and we talked about Nefertiti the entire recess.

Janet found this activity to be very beneficial. Not only was she able to expose the students to new information, but she was also able to assess the students' background knowledge about Egyptian culture by the questions they asked and how they were able to respond to their classmates' questions.

> The responses I got from the students and the looks on their faces made all of the work I did very worth it. I did not lose them one time during the entire hour, and I did not have one behavior problem or anything! They seemed to really enjoy the Nefertiti project. Even if they did not really enjoy it, I think that all of them asked me, Nefertiti, insightful questions and I did not have one behavior problem during the entire hour I was talking to all 23 of them.

Janet's belief that the use of creative dramatics helps students retain the information being taught was confirmed when she gave them a test at the end of the unit. Student performance on oral and written assessments indicated mastery of information by the majority of the students.

> In addition to assessing their background knowledge during the question and answer session on the day of my performance, I also gave them a test at the end of the entire unit. I gave them a choice of two essays. One of the essays was to describe the mummification process and the other was to recount and describe the effect Akhenaten and Nefertiti had on Egyptian Civilization during their reign. Most of the students got very close to full credit on their essay responses. Another question on the test was to tell me something new and interesting they had learned about ancient Egyptian culture and whether or

> not they were going to try and find out more ancient Egypt and how the people of the time lived. A lot of the girls wrote that they were surprised that girls could not be educated but boys could. They told me how much they did not like that and that they were going to try to learn more about it. This let me know that my portrayal of Nefertiti left a lasting effect on my class.

The response Janet got from her students seems to reaffirm her belief that relating to students on their level, through the use creative dramatics, is an effective teaching strategy.

During her student teaching experience Janet did numerous other activities using creative dramatics. One such activity known as the "Archaeological Discoveries Forum" was used in order to make sharing the students' individual projects on mummies more interesting. Janet revealed that this activity came to her "off the top of [her] head."

> I knew that I wanted the students to share their projects with one another, because they had worked so hard on them and they were, for the most part, very well thought out, and that I wanted them to pay attention to one another. I also knew that this would be a good opportunity to work on public speaking skills so that's where the idea came from. The Archaeological Discoveries Forum made the sharing of the students' projects more official, more important.

Student input played an important role in this activity. Janet felt that the more input a student had in an activity, the more engaged they would be and the more pride they would have in their product.

> [The students] came up with guidelines about how they thought professional archaeologists would act and how they would present their discoveries. They decided that an archaeologist would be professional and articulate. That they would tell their audience about the important information in a concise manner. The students also argued that they audience would also be professional, would ask pertinent questions, and would not giggle at their colleagues on stage. They came up with some good guidelines to follow. This gave me criteria to grade them on when they made their presentations.

Janet felt that constructing the project presentations in this manner made the students more conscious of the way they spoke in front of the classroom, which was one of her goals.

> They did a remarkable job on their presentations. My clinical instructor was even blown away. Most of them came in with note cards, or noted on paper, to make sure that they shared all of the important points. Most of the students made a conscious effort not to laugh or shift from foot to foot. The non-presenting students that made up the audience were also great. They asked questions that pertained to the presenter's presentation and there were no negative comments or behaviors. They tried to be really courteous and professional.

Time was the defining factor of the next project Janet did using creative dramatics. She was asked by her third grade clinical instructor to teach her sister's third grade class at another local area school about Egypt. Because Janet had only thirty-five minutes to share with the students as much as possible about Egypt, she saw it as a challenge and one that she believed she could accomplish through the use of creative dramatics.

> I did not want to just stand there and talk or lecture to the children about [Egypt] and I did not have the time to really get involved with "hands-on" activities. My solution was to solicit the help of a colleague and do a skit of sorts. I decided to use the pyramids as the theme of the entire skit. My rationale was that The Great Pyramids are located in Giza, with a map of Egypt I can get in a little geography. Inside the pyramids there are usually hieroglyphics, artifacts, mummies, canopic jars, treasure (or lack there of), and Pharaohs are also buried inside. These are some of the major topics in ancient Egyptian culture. Based on the old Standards of Learning for third grade social studies I decided that I would introduce all of these subjects to them and leave some activities behind for them to explore the information further...

In addition to the time constraint challenges Janet overcame, she also effectively dealt with other challenges classroom teachers face on a daily basis such as, capturing students' attention, addressing the different learning styles of students effectively, and making sure that students retain the information presented. Unlike other lessons taught, Janet was not building on previously taught information. This

lesson was supplemental because the state of Virginia's Standards Of Learning had changed so that Egypt would not be covered in third grade it would be taught in second grade. So the third grade classes of 1997 would not have learned about Egypt because they were the class that would miss Egypt in the transition, but they would be tested on it in the standardized tests given by the state.

In order to perform this skit, Janet solicited the help of a colleague and created a magazine "complete with pictures of the great pyramids in Giza, treasure found on King Tutankhamen's tomb, mummification tools, and activities based on Egyptian numbers, hieroglyphics, etc., to help with this task."

> [I had to] solicit the help of a colleague. I was only given a few days notice by my clinical instructor to teach her sister's third grade class about Egypt. The preparation of the magazine was not time consuming, taking only a few hours to create. The magazine was created to follow along in the same order of the skit, with only a flip of the page to get to a new topic. Susan, the colleague who I asked to help with this project, was a great help with the creation of the magazine and in the performance of the skit. The pictures, for the magazine, were photocopied from the personal collection of Susan (she had gone to Egypt as a youngster). I had accumulated the activities from teaching an Egyptian unit two other times before. It was only a matter of choosing, the activities I thought would be pertinent and fun. The skit came to me off of the top of my head after I knew that I would have help, and that pyramids would be the unifying theme. Nothing was written. It was very helpful that Susan

> also had a great deal of background knowledge of Egypt, and an Egyptian costume, this is why she got the part of Neffie. It was only a matter of knowing what our characters were, what topics we were going to discuss, and when we would discuss them. We only collaborated for a maximum of two hours total.

Again, the time Janet put into her skit seemed to be well worth it. She later received notice from the teacher of that class that the students enjoyed the presentation. The students constantly came to her to talk about facts they had learned during the presentation as well as after the presentation on their own time.

> We got a very positive response from the students. We allowed them time to ask questions at the end of the performance and they asked thoughtful questions about Egypt. They also gave us a lot of positive feedback. I talked to their regular classroom teacher some time later and she said that they really enjoyed the lesson, they remembered what we talked about, and wanted to learn more about the culture. They even sent me a little thank you card.

The last creative dramatics project of Janet's that will be discussed was not directly related to the curriculum, but rather it was an extra-curricular drama activity for her sixth grade students.

> [There was an] eighth period which was designed as a time to do preparatory work at the end of the day for the Literacy Passport Tests (LPT). At the beginning of the year there was a five week lag time until the LPT prep was to start up. The teachers, at a team meeting, were struggling to figure out what

> structured activities they could provide to fill that gap, so I piped up and said 'I will teach a drama class at the end of the day.' Before I could finish my sentence they said 'OKAY!' Surprisingly, my students did not want to perform, but they did want to learn more about acting. The class proceeded as I had planned; I taught them a lot of acting techniques, that is, everything was going fine until the last week. In the last week of the five week period of time my students sprang the news on me. They wanted to do a play. After I picked my chin up off of the floor I began to prepare for the students to perform a play. I could not deny them the chance to perform if that was what they really wanted to do.

Janet and the students decided that they would keep the play as simple as possible. They also decided that they would choose a subject that they were all familiar with. They decided to do a play based on the fairy tale Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs. This project was a definite challenge for Janet because it came as a last minute surprise. It required her to spend time after school to write a script because there was not an existing script that would accommodate her class of nineteen students. The forty-five page script was titled Snow White and the Ten Dwarfs. An adaptation of the original Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs.

> After we decided that [Snow White] would be the play, we had to brainstorm all of the characters we could possibly think of. The students had to decide which characters they would audition for. On Monday (day 2), the students auditioned and that afternoon after school was out my clinical instructor and I

> casted the play. On Tuesday (day 3), one half of the cast got their scripts and began working on them and the other half worked on character development. Wednesday (day 4), the second half of the class got their scripts and we worked on the play scene by scene. Thursday (day 5), we rehearsed the entire play from start to finish. Friday (performance day) came and the students had memorized their lines and ready to go.

Janet was not the only one responsible for this production. The students also had a lot of responsibility for this play. She appointed a student stage manager, because he did not want to act.

> I had one student who was very shy about getting in front of the class to act so I asked him to be the stage manager. He really took his job seriously. Every day, at the end of rehearsal, he reported to me with notes of things to work on during the next rehearsal. He would often take a group of actors to another room and work with them on lines and blocking which are choreographed movements around the stage. The stage manager was not abusing his role, and his classmates listened to him and respected him. His parents later came to me and told me how excited they were to hear him talk about being involved with something because he normally keeps to himself. He really came out of his shell.

The students were also responsible for their own costumes and props and also had a say in how the script was written.

> I wrote the script because I wanted to save time, I knew that I would do it before the next rehearsal came. I felt a little bad about that so, I gave the students editing power over the script. If they wanted to make changes they could, as long as the people sharing the scene agreed with the changes.

Although this project was not directly related to the curriculum, the students had a powerful reaction to participating in this play. Janet and her clinical instructor saw many of the students grow as individuals and as a group.

> They worked really hard to get everything done. They also had to work together in groups a lot because I would not work with all of them at the same time. I was so incredibly proud, of them. After the Snow White play something really nice happened. The same week we decided to put on the play we also got a new student, she auditioned for the lead, and got the role. After the play, she was a very confident young lady and began making friends. When she first arrived, she did not want to be at school and was even crying. This was quite a change from her first day with us. I think that this was a very positive change. I also noticed that when students were working together in groups, they really cooperated with each other, and they became very supportive of one another. They built on each others strengths and I like that.

Janet provides an example of teachers who implement creative dramatics as a highly effective teaching strategy. Janet informed me that creative dramatics was not her only method of teaching, but that it was one that she, as well as her students really enjoyed. Based on Janet's experience, as well as the experience of other teachers who

use creative dramatics, students indeed do experience cognitive as well as social gains. Other studies, in addition to my own, continue to support that engaging students through the use of creative dramatics will foster cognitive as well as social growth in learners.

Discussion

Both Chris and Janet have used creative dramatic in the classroom and have seen positive results in their students' behavior and achievement. Although the teachers did not state the specific cognitive and social gains their students have made, it can be gathered from their comments that these gains are taking place. I would propose for future study that students' cognitive and social gains be measured when creative dramatics is used. I would also propose that case studies which chronicle the specific use of creative dramatics in classrooms be written. The activities that are done by the participating teachers could eventually be catalogued into a book of suggested creative dramatic activities to be used in the classroom.

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